



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN SPENCE

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING ON U.S. NATIONAL MISSILE

DEFENSE POLICY AND THE ABM TREATY

This morning the committee meets to consider the growing threat to the United States posed by the global proliferation of ballistic missiles, and the status of efforts being undertaken to protect Americans against this threat.

It will not surprise anyone to learn I believe that the deployment of an NMD system must be a national priority. Currently, the United States has no defense against even a single ballistic missile launched in our direction, whether by accident or by design. Unfortunately, poll after poll indicates that most Americans remain unaware of this fact. I believe Americans have been lulled into a false sense of security by either a belief that we already have defenses, or by assertions that the ballistic missile threat to our country is decades away. The reality is that America is vulnerable to this threat today.

Yesterday, the committee received a sobering briefing on the intelligence community's latest estimate of the ballistic missile threat to the United States. Unlike previous National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), this estimate painted a more troubling picture of a world in which ballistic missiles continue to proliferate – a world where rogue states like North Korea and Iran have the capability to strike not only at our forces, allies, and interests abroad, but to hold the American people at risk here at home.

For years, the Administration downplayed this threat, leading this committee to mandate creation of a bipartisan commission to independently assess the ballistic missile threat to the United States. That commission, headed by former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, concluded that the threat to the United States is "broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly" than the intelligence community had predicted. Significantly, the intelligence community's latest NIE confirms many of the Rumsfeld Commission's findings.

Last week, the committee heard from the United States Commission on National Security/21st Century, a bipartisan group of experts who unanimously concluded that in the next 25 years, "America will become increasingly vulnerable to hostile attack on our homeland.... Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers". Ballistic missiles carrying weapons of mass destruction are attractive weapons for states seeking to exploit this vulnerability.

(MORE)

Congress has repeatedly expressed its support for a robust national missile defense program. We have increased funding for NMD and have encouraged the Administration to proceed with NMD development and deployment with all deliberate speed. Earlier this year, Congress passed the National Missile Defense Act of 1999, which declared it to be the policy of the United States to deploy a national missile defense “as soon as is technologically possible”. Although the President signed the National Missile Defense Act into law in July, the Administration’s commitment to a policy of NMD deployment remains in doubt.

Less than two weeks ago, the United States conducted a successful intercept of a long-range ballistic missile target. This test was an important milestone that has been likened to “hitting a bullet with a bullet.” Along with other recent theater missile defense test successes, it demonstrated that the technology to defend Americans can be made to work.

Unfortunately, progress toward the timely deployment of effective missile defenses is at risk due to the Administration’s lack of commitment to a deployment decision and, simultaneously, its strong commitment to continued U.S. adherence to the ABM Treaty – a treaty negotiated during the Cold War, signed with a country that no longer exists, and designed to perpetuate America’s vulnerability to missile attack.

To address these important issues, we are fortunate to have with us this morning a panel of experts on the issues of missile defense and the ABM Treaty. They are:

- Dr. William Graham, former Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and member of the Rumsfeld Commission;
- Dr. Keith Payne, President of the National Institute for Public Policy;
- Mr. R. James Woolsey, former Director of Central Intelligence under President Clinton and member of the Rumsfeld Commission; and
- Mr. Michael Krepon, President of the Henry L. Stimson Center.

Following our first panel, we will reconvene at 1:30 PM to hear from a panel of Administration witnesses. They are:

- Mr. Walter Slocumbe, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; and
- Mr. Lucas Fischer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Strategic Affairs.

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